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# *Lifelong Learning: Learn as if You Were to Live Forever*

**SHEELA PARAMASIVAM, TEOH JOO TONG & CHONG GEE LING**  
**UiTM CAWANGAN NEGERI SEMBILAN KAMPUS SEREMBAN**

*"Live as if you were to die tomorrow. Learn as if you were to live forever" – Mahatma Gandhi*

*"Commit yourself to lifelong Learning. The most valuable asset you will ever have is your mind and what you put into it" – Albert Einstein*

*"Anyone who stops learning is old, whether at twenty or eighty. Anyone who keeps learning stays young," – Henry Ford*

The above quotes spoken and mentioned by our world leaders and geniuses define what lifelong learning (LLL) is all about. Many may think that education is gained only in formal institutions, such as schools, colleges, or universities, and stops when one obtains a certificate, diploma, or degree and moves on to working life. Yes, in Malaysia and many countries, formal education begins at the age of five for a toddler going into daycare or playschool and then proceeding into primary education at the age of 7 till 12 years old, then into secondary education from ages 13 till 17 years old, and then proceeding to tertiary education at the age of 18 till about 23 years old. So, after graduating from university, many go on to the working world and claim, "I have finished my studies". The question is... does learning stop here? What is lifelong learning, and how does it shape our lives?



Lifelong learning (LLL), as defined by Green (2002), literally means that learning should take place at all stages of the life cycle (from the cradle to the grave) and, in more recent versions, that it should be life-wide; that is, embedded in all life contexts from the school to the workplace, the home, and the community. The learning society, therefore, is the vision of a society where there are recognized opportunities for learning for every person, wherever they are and however old they are and however old they should be (Green, 2002). LLL is the continuous building of skills and knowledge during one's life, which occurs through experiences faced in a lifetime.

The LLL concept refers to the activities people undertake throughout their lives to enhance their knowledge, skills, and competence in a particular field, driven by personal, societal, or employment-related motives (Aspin & Chapman, 2000).

There are four pillars of lifelong learning: "learning to be," "learning to know," "learning to do," and "learning to live together" (Laal, 2013). Thus, learning does not stop till we breathe our last.

Laal (2011) states that LLL takes place at all times and in all areas, as:

- Age 0-5 years: This age sets the foundation for learning. It has the highest amount of informal learning, as children imitate almost everything from their parents, peers, and their environment.
- Age 6-24 years: Learning occurs in educational institutions, ranging from primary and secondary to tertiary levels. Family life, social organisations, religious institutions, and mass media have a role in learning during this time.

- Age 25-60 years: This age group can learn informally through various means, including instructional media, their occupations, workplaces, colleagues, travel, mass media, information technologies, the environment, and nature. Adults learn from experiences and problem-solving. There is continuous development of intellect, capability, and integrity.
- Age 60+ years: This is the retirement age when elderly people can learn a great deal from activities suitable to their age, such as art, music, sports, handicrafts, and social work. They can also carry out voluntary work in community organisations, clubs and associations (Rojvithee, 2005).

There are many advantages of lifelong learning for individuals, as it encompasses their careers, relationships, family, and society. Firstly, lifelong learning provides personal growth and well-being. It fosters personal fulfilment, allowing one to experience the joys of learning, improved mental and physical well-being, and increased self-confidence. For example, a career woman upon retirement may opt to join a yoga or fitness program to exercise regularly, or even form a group and go for morning or evening walks, or attend prayer meetings or religious activities. Sharing knowledge about health benefits as well as networking with friends will lead to self-fulfilment and personal well-being.

Secondly, lifelong learning can be viewed as a means of career advancement and enhanced employability (Laal, 2011). In today's fast-paced world, it is essential for individuals to continually upskill their knowledge and skills to meet the demands of the workplace. This may include enhancing soft skills, communication, and ICT skills to keep abreast with the latest trends in the job market. For example, taking an ICT computer course or learning to sell goods online is viewed as a means of career advancement or as a part-time income source.



Thirdly, lifelong learning is considered as a means of fostering social relationships within society. This is because lifelong learning has no boundaries or barriers. It provides learning opportunities for all groups of people, including teenagers, adults, and older individuals, as long as they are willing to engage with it. Thus, it promotes a fairer and more equitable society.

While there are benefits to lifelong learning, there are also challenges to it. These include a lack of personalisation, as one may be unsure how to personalise their learning experiences to meet their individual needs. Additionally, there may be limitations to resources, such as financial constraints, technological challenges, or a lack of specialists to promote programs. In addition, factors such as a lack of motivation and society's attitude can also limit engagement in lifelong learning. Gender bias is also another factor that hinders lifelong learning, especially in women. In traditional societies, many women are viewed as homemakers, particularly in certain cultures where women are not permitted to work and their primary roles are to cook, clean, and care for their families.

However, with technology and modernisation, this perspective is changing, and lifelong learning is seen more as a need and necessity for survival. Technology has become a powerful enabler of lifelong learning, offering new opportunities and transforming learning experiences (Laa et al., 2013). For example, e-learning platforms provide access to numerous educational resources, regardless of geographical location or physical constraints. One can access countless educational materials, conduct business, or network with a broader audience (Nordin et al., 2010). In addition, digital tools,

multimedia, and interactive platforms promote self-directed learning and personalisation. Learners can set their own goals, explore topics, and track their own progress at their own pace and on their own schedule. Besides, e-learning platforms facilitate collaboration and interaction, whether for academic, business, or social purposes (Nordin et al., 2010). Advancements in technology and digitalisation have also led to continuous learning and reskilling, primarily to fulfil work-related practices.

In Malaysia, the expansion of entrepreneurship and rising cost of living have given prominence to lifelong learning (The Star, 2019). Many initiatives by our government and NGOs have benefited our society in promoting lifelong learning. A recent article, "Supporting Homemakers" by Athira Yusof and Arfa Yunus in The Star, dated September 19, 2025, highlights the need to empower homemakers with adequate resources, as studies show that nine out of 10 women rely solely on their husbands for income. Thus, experts have called for training, flexible work opportunities, and EPF schemes to boost confidence and provide them with financial independence. Heading this call, Persatuan Suri Rumah Rahmah (SRR), with more than 1000 members nationwide, organises training sessions on marketing, copywriting and small enterprise basics, as well as safety, health and social awareness, to empower women, especially those who have left their careers to become homemakers, to upskill themselves to ease their financial burden. Updates are shared via its website and social media. National Human Resource Organisation president Zarina Ismail further adds that homemakers can gain financial independence through targeted training and confidence-building (The Star, 19 Sept, 2025). Additionally, she emphasised that what is most needed is a change in mindsets and an open acceptance of learning. Now, is this not what lifelong learning is all about?

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